



A national study of how community-level factors impact children's developmental outcomes

About the Kids in Communities Study:

The Kids in Communities Study (KICS) is an ongoing cross-disciplinary international collaboration of experts from Australia and Canada in the areas of early childhood health and development, health services research, social science, urban planning, and government policy. The KICS study was established in order to better understand how community-level factors in five areas—**physical environment, social environment, socio-economic factors, access to services, and governance**—are influencing early childhood developmental outcomes. Using an innovative research approach, this project aims to identify modifiable community level factors that influence children's health and developmental outcomes in areas of advantage and disadvantage across Australia.

KICS was developed from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), which is a population progress measure of child development. The 2012 AEDC data collection captured 97.5% of children aged approximately five years old. Based on a successful [pilot study](#) conducted in two AEDC local communities in Victoria in 2010, the KICS study has received an ARC Linkage grant from the Australian Government enabling the study to expand to at 25 communities in VIC, NSW, QLD, SA, and ACT, from 2014-2016. KICS investigators include academic experts from 6 universities, and policymakers and child development professionals from 10 government and non-government partner organisations. The research team brings a wealth of experience to investigating two research questions:

- Are there **local community level factors that are consistently related to better outcomes for children?**
- Of these, **what are the best measurable and modifiable community level factors** that influence children's developmental and health outcomes across communities?

Study background:

Why is this study needed? Healthy child development is the basis for future community and economic development. A large and growing body of research emphasises the importance of the prenatal and early years for health and developmental outcomes throughout life. If children are not developing well by the time they start school, it becomes more difficult to help them get back on track as they get older.

Many research studies have found that the local environment at the community level has a major impact on the healthy development of children, particularly on the resources that are available to families to promote good development. Research shows that in disadvantaged communities, lack of resources and opportunities can result in worse child development outcomes that can persist from one generation to the next. However, there are also many factors—such as involved parents and families, active community organisations, and neighbourhoods that are safe to walk in and have good places to play—that can promote healthy child development even in lower income communities.

We need to understand more about how community-level factors impact child development, and which factors are open to change. This knowledge will help to develop effective policies and programs to improve child development outcomes in all communities. The KICS study will make a major contribution to this field of research by developing a set of measures which can be used by communities, policy makers, and other stakeholders to develop policies and programs to improve child development in their communities. KICS is based on an ecological view of child development, which means that children's development is impacted by many factors working at different levels of society, including the child's family, the community, and local, state and federal government policies. This theory shows how children's development is influenced by everyday interactions between children and their social and physical environment. (See Figure 1 on page 2)

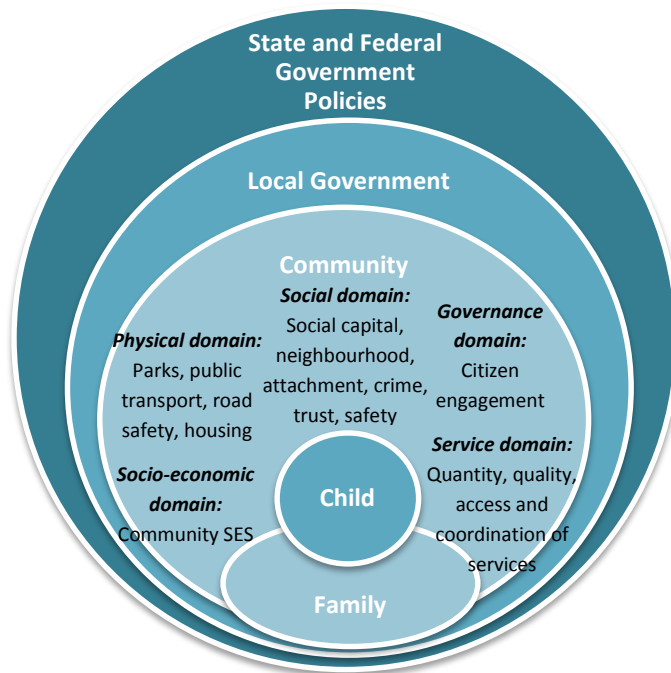


Figure. 1. The KICS study looks at different community levels factors affecting children. This diagram is from our recently published scientific article, "Neighbourhood Effects Influencing Early Childhood Development: Conceptual Model and Trial Measurement Methodologies from the Kids in Communities Study" in *Social Indicators Research*, Feb 2014

Study methods:

KICS will use a variety of research methods conducted in three phases. In *Phase 1*, we will use different types of data about child development and socio-economic status to find communities in VIC, NSW, QLD, SA, and the ACT where children are developing unexpectedly well or poorly when compared with the socio-economic status of their suburb (i.e., "off-diagonal"). These communities will be compared to other communities where children's outcomes match the predicted outcomes based on their socio-economic status. In *Phase 2*, we will collect data using community surveys, service surveys, and focus groups, interviews with local stakeholders and experts, and mapping of neighbourhoods. In *Phase 3*, we will analyse the data and develop a manual for communities and local governments to use in measuring and improving child development outcomes. We will share our findings in academic publications, publications for community audiences, and policy roundtables with our partner investigators.

Benefits of the study:

Findings from KICS will have the potential to help governments at all levels improve policies relating to child development, by providing more information on what factors are consistently related to better outcomes for children. This information will also help researchers and community stakeholders to properly measure outcomes in their communities, and respond with new evidence-based ways of improving children's wellbeing.

Investigators and partners:

Chief investigators:
A/Prof Sharon Goldfeld, Prof Billie Giles-Corti, Prof Robert Tanton, A/Prof Sally Brinkman, Prof Ilan Katz, A/Prof Geoff Woolcock
Universities:
Australia: The University of Melbourne, The University of Canberra, The University of Western Australia, The University of New South Wales; Canada: University of British Columbia, Mount Saint Vincent University; US: University of California, Los Angeles
Federal and state government partner organisations:
Australian Government Dept of Education and Training, Australian Bureau of Statistics, VIC Dept of Education and Training, ACT Community Services Directorate, Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, QLD Dept of Education, Training and Employment, SA Dept for Education and Child Development, NSW Dept of Education and Communities, NSW Dept of Family and Community Services
Non-government partner organisations:
The Smith Family, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Wesley Mission Brisbane, Uniting Care, The Benevolent Society
Philanthropic partner: John Cameron Foundation

For more information about KICS, please view our website: http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/az/Kids_in_Communities_Study/ or contact Karen Villanueva at karen.villanueva@mcri.edu.au